

The Pirate of Alastair

By RUPERT SARGENT HOLLAND

Author of "The Count at Harvard," etc.

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CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

"Don't you think that a girl who's engaged to one man ought to tell other men so?"

She drew back sharply and faced me with astounded eyes.

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Selden?"

"I was in for it, so plunged ahead."

"That day you came to the ship, I had no idea," I blundered on. "I did not know you were such a friend of Alastair's."

"Well," she said, "and now that you know?"

"I think you should have told me. I ought to have known before that afternoon."

She was haughtiness itself. "Why, what affair was it of yours?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I was entitled to know."

"I cannot understand why. What makes you think that Mr. Selden and I—"

She hesitated a second—"are such old friends?"

Of a sudden we were in a very nasty temper, facing each other.

"I happened to see his picture in your pocket. It was lying open, face upward."

She did not even tap her foot; she simply sat still and looked her indignation at me.

"Really, Mr. Selden, I cannot see how that affects you. What reason could there be for telling you my personal affairs?"

I stuck doggedly at it. "I think I should have been told," I repeated.

She gave me a single glance, then rose. "I am going back to the Penguin Club," she said.

I rose also. "Very good. I will see you there."

"No," she turned to me sharply. "I prefer to go back alone."

She was imperious; I could be equally so.

"And I prefer to go with you. The pines are lonely, and it is growing late. I saw at least that duty to your aunt."

Then she tapped her foot impatiently, angrily. "You are very tiresome, Mr. Selden. I am my own mistress, and I do not want your company."

"And I will not let you go back alone."

"You are very rude," she looked over at the beach as if for some possible help.

"There is no one else," she asked aloud.

There came a voice from the cabin steps behind me. "If you will permit me, mademoiselle, I should esteem it a great honor."

We both started as if we were shot, and faced about. A tall, somewhat angular man stood before us, hat in hand, bowing low to Miss Graham.

"I heard your question," he said, "and I took it on myself to answer it. Permit me." He stepped forward and placed himself at the girl's side.

"Who are you?" I asked, all amazement, for I was surprised out of my wits.

"My name is Pierre Duponceau, the stranger said, ignoring me and addressing Miss Graham. And I count myself fortunate in coming on a lady in distress."

We both stood still, taking in the queer figure. Never had I seen a man just like him. He was dressed all in black, but his clothes were singularly rich and of strange pattern. From his shoulders hung a black cloak held under his chin by two heavily wrought gold chains.

Across his open waistcoat, which was black satin flowered in white, were three gold chains, and there were rings on his fingers.

Moreover, his manner was strange, exotic, polished to a degree, and his voice had a peculiar, fascinating foreign softness that I had never heard in any other man. His height was over six feet. I recognized the figure that I had seen in the storm.

He was smiling easily, the least perturbed of the three. "Permit me, mademoiselle," he repeated, and offered Miss Graham his arm.

She shot one glance at me, and then, half smiling, placed her hand on his arm. So he led her across the deck to the ladder.

I was still dumb with surprise. I saw the man in black leap to the path, help Miss Graham down the ladder, cross the caseway, and disappear with her behind the cliff. Then I sat down on a chair.

Was I awake or dreaming? A man had come out of the ship at a crucial moment, and a man who, my instinct told me, was not of our age or people. I no longer recognized Alastair; I was beginning even to doubt my sober self.

CHAPTER IX.

Darkness fell, and still the man in the cloak did not return, and I went back to the cottage with my curiosity unsatisfied. I did not know what to make of his sudden appearance, nor of the summary fashion in which he had interposed between Miss Graham and myself. He, a total stranger, escorting her home through the woods! And yet this phase of the matter did not so much surprise me, for I felt intuitively that we were dealing with a gentleman. As far as my recollection of sea-rovers went, I recalled that pirates had always been scrupulously polite in their relations with the gentler sex.

There was no gainsaying that this sudden apparition had interposed himself between Miss Graham and me, yet I did not resent this so much as I might have, because things had been coming to a very bad pass, and might speedily have resulted in even more serious trouble than had occurred.

I questioned Charles closely as to whether he had detected any suspicious characters prowling about the beach, but his answer was in the negative. "If you should notice anything unusual," I told him, "be sure to report it immediately to me."

It was clear to me that something was happening of more substantial texture than a dream.

Later in the evening I lighted my pipe and walked in the direction of the ship.

As I came to the path I saw the man in the cloak sitting on deck, and bailed him. "May I come on board, Monsieur Duponceau?"

He rose and peered at me through the dusk. "Is it the gentleman who dined here this afternoon?" he asked, somewhat suspiciously.

"The same."

"You are welcome," he answered, and I could not help smiling at his assumption of ownership.

He shook hands with me as I came on board, waved to the vacant chair, and poured me water in one of my own glasses.

"I must apologize that I have no wine to offer you," he said in such a manner that my likings instantly went out to him. "I should not even have had the pleasure of offering you this but for the fact that you yourself provided it."

"Will you smoke?" I handed him a cigar, which he accepted, and lighted with a match I furnished. For the first time I noticed a pair of heavy pistols on the table.

"You travel well guarded," said I, looking at them.

"I have need," he answered, "grave need." I looked closely at him. He was in perfect earnest, his pale face absolutely serious, his deep eyes set beneath black brows. He pushed his somewhat long hair back from a fine, broad forehead. "I do not know you you are, sir, but I take you for a friend—one I assure you of a class now sadly small."

"I live near the beach," I explained, "and my name is Selden. I imagine that you are a stranger to this shore?"

"An absolute stranger. I come from the other side of the ocean. This is the first time I have ever been to America."

I waited, but he would vouchsafe nothing further. So we sat and smoked silently, while I felt his keen eyes studying me.

"May I ask your age, Mr. Selden?" he said at length.

"Certainly. Twenty-eight."

"Ah! You are very much younger than I. I am somewhere between 40 and 50, one who has seen much, and so almost an old man."

I could not imagine what was coming. "It is in reference to this afternoon," he said, as though in answer to my thoughts. "When I hear a woman in distress I am water, I cannot but interpose. Still, as I returned here this evening I thought that possibly you might feel aggrieved. Believe me, Mr. Selden, at the time I had eyes only for the lady."

He paused, then went on: "If you will pardon a much older man, I would give you a bit of counsel. Never contend with a woman; let her have her way. Above all, never contend with a woman who cares for you."

"I have the least reason in the world to think that this one does?" I answered.

He made no reply, but smoked thoughtfully. I suddenly found his further silence unendurable.

"What are your plans, sir?" I asked abruptly. "For I do not suppose that you dropped down here entirely by chance, and intend to stay until chance again moves you away."

"No, I did not arrive solely by chance," he answered, "although that had much to do with it. But I expect to stay until fortune, be it good or bad, summons me. That is, always supposing, Mr. Selden, that you do not drive me away from your beach."

"If?" I said, much surprised. "How can your stay here hurt me?"

My new acquaintance let his eyes rest upon my face a moment, then smiled as though at a passing joke of his own.

"You have a saying that 'where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise'; I will not explain, therefore, and only hope that you may never know; but—and his eyes shifted for a moment from mine to the pistols on the table—"if you do know, it will not be a very pretty piece of information."

I clenched my pipe between my teeth; the night wind was stirring; the flavor of strange adventure hung over the ship as strongly as the salt breeze from the sea. I felt myself indescribably fascinated. Duponceau drew his cloak somewhat closer around him, and muffled it about his chin, so that all of his face I could clearly see was his long, wonderful black eyes. Indeed, they were wonderful—those eyes of his. The more I looked into them, the more they held me, and yet the less I knew about the man himself.

I was just wondering if this Duponceau was not something of a hypnotist when I found that he was speaking in a soft, low, almost ruminative voice.

"I like you, Mr. Selden, I like you extremely, and so I would not bring you into any harm; and yet if you are my friend I shall most likely do so, for that course was laid upon me in the past. I have had many friends and even more enemies, and some of the friends have turned enemies, but none of the enemies friends. I tell you this so that you may the better judge, because you must be one or the other. Nobody has ever been indifferent."

I could not detect arrogance; simply the statement of facts.

"I would rather be your friend," I answered.

He was silent again, gazing at and through me with his dreamy, speculative vision. I had the feeling that I was in a measure spellbound—that I could not start a conversation for myself, could not act without his volition.

"There are reasons," he continued in time, "while I cannot tell you much. If I am not one of the world's great men by birth, I am by achievement. There was a Corsican born in the last century whom all the powers of Europe sought for years to bind and silence; there are many men

there who would do the same for me. Wherever Napoleon went he brought strife; wherever I go strife follows." He ceased looking through me, and gazed at me. "You have your quiet beach, your snug house, your summer with the fair lady of this afternoon; do you still wish me to stay?"

"The ship is any one's property," I said, "and the shore is free. If you want more, you have only to ask for it at my cottage."

"What would the lady say?" he continued.

"The lady has nothing whatever to say in the matter," I returned, annoyed at his continual reference to Miss Graham. "I am free to choose for myself."

Duponceau smiled. "Mr. Selden, you are a young man of spirit, but you are ignorant, very ignorant. It all depends on the lady. You would not weigh me in the balance for a moment if she willed otherwise. No one is free; there is always some other power. Even the Corsican could not withstand his star." The smile faded, vanished; Duponceau's eyes were stern and fixed.

"I have been called a pirate, a robber, a modern Juggernaut, but it was only because I had my vision, and could see farther than others could."

He was leagues away, his thoughts fighting. I watched him until his mind came back.

"Now," he said, "we will fight it out. I take you at your word—the ship is mine, the shore any one's property."

Suddenly he rose and stood peering up the beach. "Some one is coming," he said, and I saw that his hands felt for the pistols on the table.

I looked, and saw Charles swinging a lantern. "It is only my servant," I answered.

"Can he be trusted?"

"Implicitly."

"Tell him who I am."

We waited until Charles came on board. He showed no surprise at seeing the two of us.

"I came for the dinner things, Mr. Felix," he stated, looking at me and ignoring Duponceau.

"Charles," I said, "this is Monsieur Duponceau, who has lately come to stay in this ship. You are not to mention his presence here to any one, but will do whatever he asks. You need not take the things away; they will be of use to him in the cabin. Monsieur Duponceau, you may rely on Charles as on yourself."

Charles bowed to the man in black, a fine figure, gazing steadily at my man. I could not help noting the picture that he made, his hand still on the pistols, his soft black hat low upon his forehead, his cloak hung across his shoulder.

Charles turned to go. "Has there been any message for me?" I asked as an afterthought.

"No, Mr. Felix," Charles hesitated; "but I found a man prowling about the back road after supper, and though I'd never seen him before, I couldn't learn his business. He looked like a sly one, sir."

I turned to Duponceau; he was smiling.

"You see, Mr. Selden, how quickly my words find proof. Where I come strife follows."

(To be continued.)

The Facts in Race Suicide.

The birth rate in the United States in the days of its Anglo-Saxon youth was one of the highest in the world. The best of authority traces the beginning of its decline to the first appearance about 1850 of immigration on a large scale. Our great philosopher, Benjamin Franklin, estimated six children to a normal American family in his day. The average at the present time is slightly above two. For 1900 it is calculated that there are only about three-fourths as many children to potential mothers in America as there were forty years ago.

Were the old rate of the middle of the century sustained, there would be 15,000 more births yearly in the State of Massachusetts than now occur. In the course of a century the proportion of our entire population, consisting of children under the age of 10, has fallen from one-third to one-quarter. This, for the whole United States, is equivalent to the loss of about 7,000,000 children. So alarming has this phenomenon of the falling birth rate become in the Australian colonies that, in New South Wales, a special governmental commission has voluminously reported upon the subject. It is estimated that there has been a decline of about one-third in the fruitfulness of the people in fifteen years. New Zealand even complains of the lack of children to fill her schools. The facts concerning the stagnation, nay even the retrogression of the population of France, are too well known to need description.—Atlantic Monthly.

In Distress.

"Where be you going in such a hurry, pa?" asked the tall woman in the red sunbonnet as her husband dashed by with a powerful pair of farm horses.

"Going to pull an automobile party out of the mud, sis," laughed the old farmer. "They've got the C. D. Q. signal flying from their machine."

Tactical Skill.

He (thoughtlessly)—This bread isn't like the kind—

She (angrily)—Well, your mother made it, all the same.

He (deprecatingly)—I was going to say, my dear, like the kind we had the last time you made it.—Baltimore American.

Works Both Ways.

"Matrimony without love," remarked the married woman, "is something awful."

"It can't be more awful than love without matrimony," sighed the spinster.

Unsatisfactory Satisfaction.

Bligor—How does the new furnace work?

Kigor—Work? Say, it makes my blood boil every time I think of it!

HOT WAVE IS BROKEN

Southwest Is Much Relieved by Cooling Breezes and Rain.

CORN ESCAPED SERIOUS INJURY

Many Prostrations and Some Deaths Reported From All Sections East of Rockies.

Kansas City, Aug. 19.—Severe warm weather throughout the Southwest gave way to a limited extent last night before cooling breezes.

The day was the most trying Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma have experienced for years. Despite the excessively high temperature, however, there were comparatively few prostrations. Eight deaths were recorded at Kansas City.

Oklahoma reported excessive heat. Government thermometers at McAlester registered 113; at Ardmore, 111; at Vinita, 101; at Oklahoma City, Guthrie and Tulsa, 106.

In Kansas City and Western Missouri the temperature was near the 100 mark all the afternoon.

New York Has Big Downpour. New York, Aug. 19.—The steady downpour which during the last two days has broken all August rainfall records, is over. The city's rain gauges show a total precipitation of 5½ inches as the official record of the storm.

Fierce Wind in Charleston. Charleston, S. C., Aug. 19.—As a result of a fierce wind and rain storm which passed over this city yesterday, all the telegraph wires leading into the city are down and communication with the outside world is by long-distance telephone. No loss of life is reported.

Heat Record at Fort Worth. Fort Worth, Tex., Aug. 19.—With the weather bureau thermometer registering 111 degrees and street thermometers recording 120 degrees, yesterday was the hottest in the history of Fort Worth.

Five Killed in St. Louis. St. Louis, Aug. 19.—Despite a decided drop in the temperature, five more deaths were recorded here yesterday as a result of the heat. Three of these were persons previously prostrated. The maximum temperature today was 89 degrees.

Three Deaths at Norfolk. Norfolk, Neb., Aug. 19.—The heat claimed three victims in Norfolk and vicinity last night.

ROBBERS BIND WATCHMAN. Desperate Attempt to Blow Safe of Portland Factory.

Portland, Aug. 19.—Safecrackers made a desperate effort to get into the safe of the Dornbecher Manufacturing company yesterday morning and succeeded in badly damaging the safe with three charges of nitro-glycerine, but did not get at the contents.

E. R. Mickley was in the fireproof of the factory when he was suddenly seized by one of four men, all of them masked and armed. He was thrown down and his arms tied behind him.

They then went back to the factory, gathering up a sledge hammer and other tools, and went at the safe. They knocked off the knob with a hammer and drilling holes, set off in all three charges of nitro-glycerine. In the midst of their work a switch engine pulled into the siding to pick up cars from the factory, the brakeman entered the rear door to get his orders and was met by a volley of shots from the robbers, one of the bullets going through his hat. He promptly ran off and the engine backed down town, going back in half an hour with police aid. As the engine returned, Mickley was found but the robbers had gone, leaving a pint bottle of nitro-glycerine and all their tools in the factory office.

Miss Elkins May Marry. Rome, Aug. 19.—Rumors are current here today that all the objections of the Duke of Abruzzi to Miss Katherine Elkins, of West Virginia, have been removed. The couple, according to the latest reports, will be married as soon as the duke returns his exploration trip in the Himalayas. United States Senator Elkins has repeatedly denied that his daughter was to marry the duke, declaring that if Miss Elkins is ever married it will be to an American.

Powers Caution Cretans. Canes, Crete, Aug. 19.—The foreign consuls here, on behalf of the international squadron now anchored in Canes bay, today notified the Cretan government that the Greek flag would be hauled down today. They warned the government that irreparable consequences will follow any attack made on a landing party. On account of this warning the Cretan authorities issued an appeal to the people not to obstruct the action of the powers.

Troops to Quit Fort William. Winnipeg, Aug. 19.—The regular soldiers who have been on duty at Fort William returned to their barracks here today, leaving 30 special Canadian Pacific railway constables armed with rifles to maintain order. Five hundred men are now working on the docks.

Good at Any Station.

Tough Looking Passenger (presenting ticket)—Can I get a stopoff on this?

Conductor (inspecting it)—More than that; you get a kickoff.

(Pulls bell rope.)

Thirst for Knowledge.

"I will wait a moment," said the temperance lecturer at the close of his speech. "To answer any questions you may wish to ask."

"Can a person get drunk on sauerkraut?" inquired an earnest woman in the audience whose husband had signed the pledge.

Mothers will find Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup the best remedy to use for their children during the teething period.

How Careless.

He—There was nearly a bad fire at the theater.

She—How was that?

He—The villain lit a cigarette and tossed the match into the snow!

Comic Cuts.

Practical Patriotism.

The thing for you to do now is to get busy so that you will have an income tax to be taxed when all the States agree to it. That's true patriotism.—Indianapolis News.

Lame back and Lumbago make a young man feel old. Hamlin's Wizard Oil makes an old man feel young. Absolutely nothing like it for the relief of all pain.

Prints of Man.

"There is such a masculine touch about the dresses she wears."

"You mean that smuggy streak of finger marks along the line of buttons in the back?"—Houston Post.

Experience in England shows that in towns supplied with soft water the death rate is 19.3, while in towns that have a supply of hard water it is only 18.5.

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Knew His Place.

Housemaid—Please, sir, will you come at once, the drolin' room's on fire.

Master—Well, go and tell your mistress; you know I never interfere in household matters.—Punch.

His Little Kick.

"In this matter of quick thinking," said the base ball umpire, "all the bouquets go to the players; and yet we fellows have to think as quick as they do, if not a little quicker. If a player works his thinker too slow all he gets is an error. If I do it I get a pop bottle."—Chicago Tribune.

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